

# The Globalization of Beauty The Face of Indonesian Girls in Contemporary Indonesian Teen Magazines

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**Submission date:** 30-Sep-2019 04:28PM (UTC+0800)

**Submission ID:** 1182955280

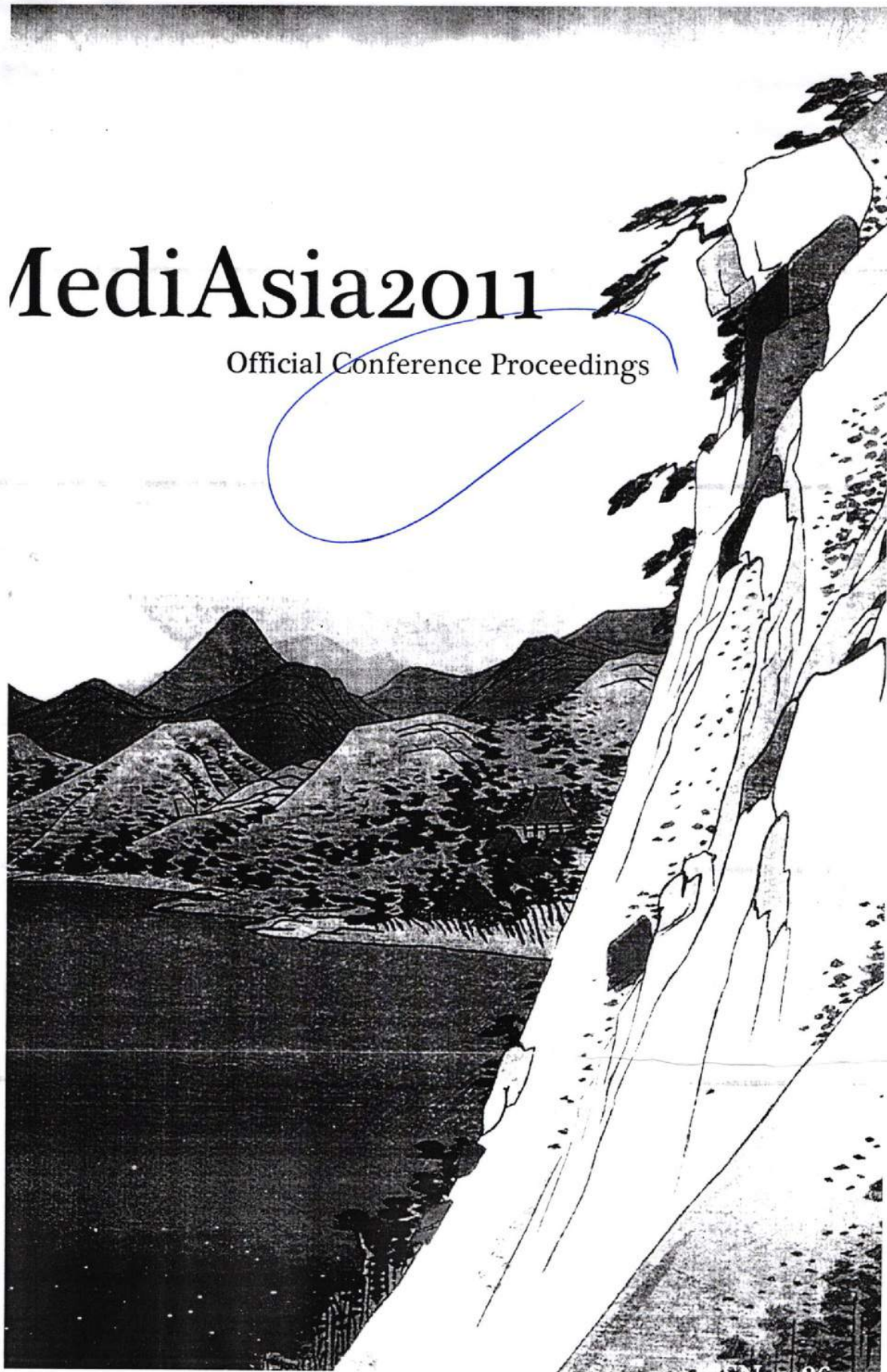
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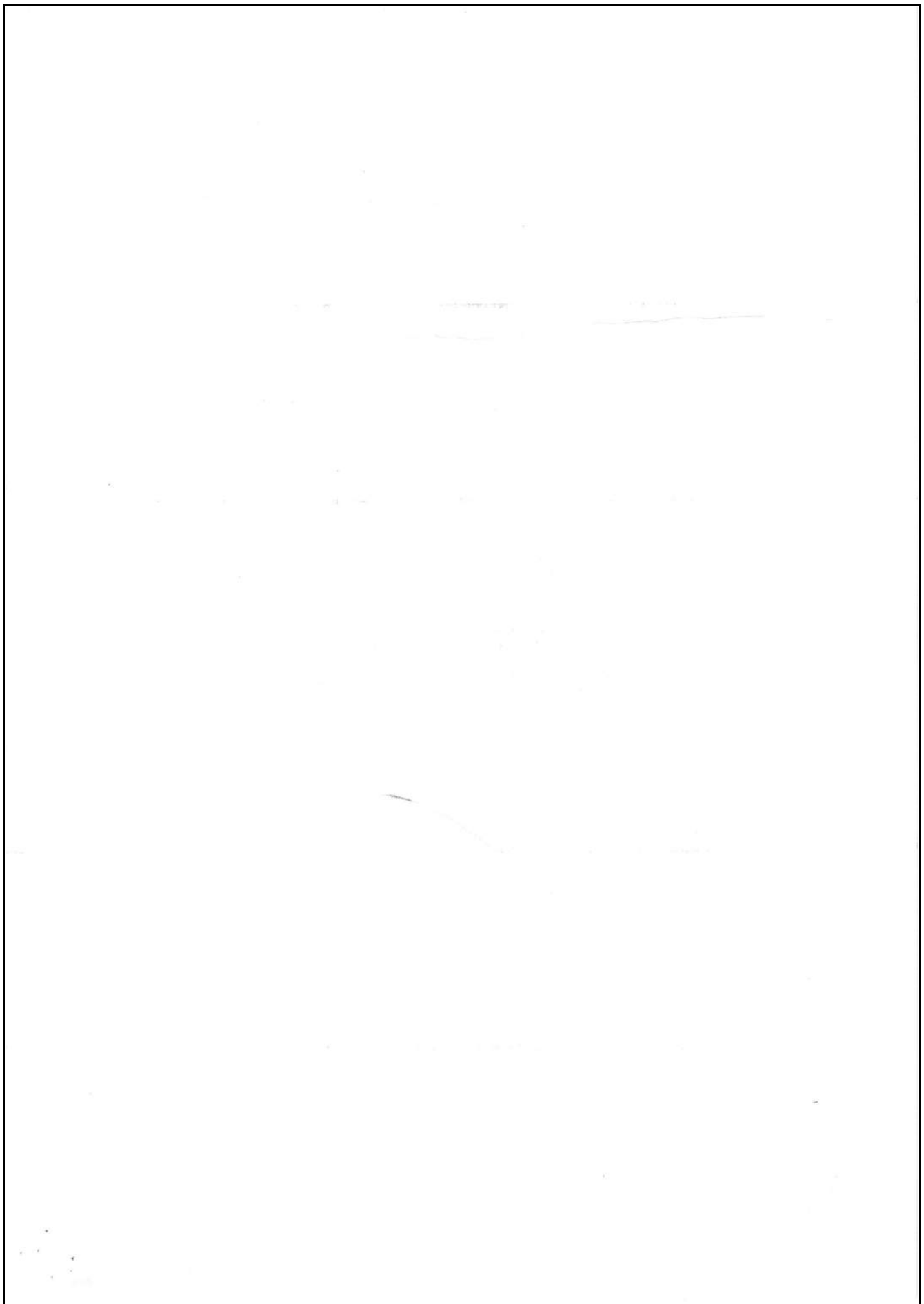
**Word count:** 10731

**Character count:** 57128

# MediAsia2011

Official Conference Proceedings





The Globalization of Beauty:  
The Face of Indonesian Girls in Contemporary Indonesian Teen Magazines

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**Abstract**

In contemporary Indonesia, globalization of media is inevitable. Ranging from advertisements to magazines, Indonesians can easily find both Indonesian editions of, for example, magazines and international editions. This especially works very well when talking about teen magazines. It is with respect to the world of female beauty that this paper will address the globalization and its effects to the representation of teen beauty in Indonesia. This paper examines the beauty industry in the media focusing on teen beauty in the teen magazines both in Indonesian editions and international editions circulated in Indonesia. By understanding how women, especially young women understand the concept of beauty and how the concept of beauty represented in the magazines, this paper also attempts to see whether there is a shift in the meaning of the concept or perception of beauty or it is merely formed by consumerism. The discussion in the paper will also comprise how the perception of beauty for teenagers is indeed a social and cultural construction within Indonesian environment in comparison to international setting. The paper is expected to provide a critical analysis of texts in popular culture that are often accepted by young people without realizing the impact of the on-going construction. As heavily mediated teen beauty ideals have put pressures on girls everywhere, we can infer that for teenagers beauty does matter. The hegemonic ideals of beauty situated within global modern beauty are not so immune for girls anywhere in particular girls in Indonesia.

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**Beauty, Media and Globalization**

In a wide range of cultural texts in Indonesia especially in contemporary popular culture, women often become the main focus or even an object in those texts. Advertising, for example, where women become the main consumers, women frequently becomes an object or even a "victim" that by and large look very unreal compared to real women in real life (in their daily lives). These images offer distorted, negative, and unrealistic images of female (Gough-Yates, p. 1 - 5). They are utopian women as the ads or the commercials, women always look stunning, beautiful, happy, fantastic, and probably spoiled, often just an empty illusion (Fuery and Mansfield, 2000).

Representation of women through constructions are often not only utopian but also still trapped in the stereotypes that long have known: the women are obsessed with their body, gentle, stupid and that women are valued half of the men. Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* (1991) has



discussed this. In this book, the Wolf as well as other feminists view that <sup>42</sup>the concept of female beauty is actually a social control that is very limiting as well as the concept of the wife and nanny. Wolf further says that the concept of female beauty has then obsessed on women and eventually entraps women in the grip of patriarchy (Wolf, p. 1-8).

<sup>10</sup>Media indeed has given a powerful representation of women and girls. Through mass media, images of women and girls have bombarded us with more or less a culture that is heavily polished by pop culture. Representation of women in products of popular culture primarily intended for children and adolescents have risen significantly in the last years. Teen magazines <sup>9</sup>for girls have given tremendous help in created girl culture, a culture that in the words of Susan Douglas *Enlightened Sexism*, wherein Douglas posits that in today's culture, "We can excel in school, play sports, go to college, aspire to—and get jobs—previously reserved for men, be working mothers, and so forth. But in exchange we must obsess about our faces, weight, breast size, clothing brands, decorating, perfectly calibrated child-rearing, about pleasing men and being envied by other women (quoted in Peggy Orenstein, p. 18).

Indonesian girl culture is not much different than what Douglas says. Numerous teen magazines such as *Gadis*<sup>1</sup> (the oldest local teen magazines first appeared in 1973, *gadis* means girl), *Kawanku* (Indonesian, means my friend), *Cita Cinta* (Indonesian, means aspiration love), *Kartika* (a common name for a girl in Indonesia) or the franchised such as *CosmoGirl!* and *Chic* are laden with the concept of female beauty especially for the girls. This culture suits to what Orenstein defines as girlie girl culture that "empha[sizes] on beauty and play-sexiness can increase girls' vulnerability to the pitfalls that most concern parents: depression, eating disorders, distorted body image, risky sexual behavior" (p. 6).

At a glance, in any newsstand, we can say teen magazines in Indonesia targeting female readers especially girls outnumber magazines targeting male readers, especially teenage boys. Most magazines for teen boys, such as *Hai* (the most famous today) are rarely focusing on boy's fashion, mostly these magazines for boys are associated with male hobbies such as *Motor* or *Muscle*. In comparison to teen girl magazines, beauty is still the *it-object*, the most sought after object sold to the female readers.



The above images show that in contemporary Indonesia, mass media plays the major role in constructing stereotypes, especially when talking about beauty. What is hip and trend, what is not, what girls should follow, what should not, the do and the don't are stereotyped by the media. Kitch

<sup>1</sup> *Gadis* is the first teen magazine for girls of Indonesian origin. It first appeared in 1973, and up to day, is still highly sought by teen girls. For more information see <http://www.gadis-online.com>

<sup>14</sup> (2001) and Bignell (1997, p.61) suggest that twentieth century magazines carry most of media stereotypes. Female magazines have significant roles in transmitting as well as constructing the beauty and feminine cultures towards their readers. These magazines heavily carry beauty constructions through the portrayals of beautiful females within them. Magazine industries especially those targeted to females have expanded the notion of what it is to be a "girl." Storey argues that girl magazines continue to "operate as *survival manuals*, providing their readers with practical advice on how to survive in a patriarchal culture" (1996, pp. 83-85). These teen magazines work as "ideological forces" in the beauty construction as well as the culture of femininity in our society (McRobbie, 1995 and Curran et al, 1996, p.69).

Through magazines, readers can appropriate what is cool and what is not and the magazine front covers carry such stronger messages. Front cover is the spirit of a magazine since headlines in the front cover will decide whether readers are compelled to buy or not. Front cover could operate as a "taster" of what can be seen within the contents of the magazine, "serves to label its possessor," and is one of the marketing strategies (McLoughlin, p.5). To follow Bignell's argument, magazine front cover consists of "iconic signs which represent the better self which every girl desires to become" (1997, p.69). In line to the aims of this paper that is to scrutiny the concept of beauty and the effect of globalization has upon such concept in teen magazines, front covers of teen magazines in Indonesia today will serve as the main data. As previously discussed, magazine front covers are rich sources to see how the beauty is constructed in Indonesian mass media; to see how the face of Indonesian girls is represented and how it is shifted in the wake of globalization. The face in the magazine front cover may serve for its young readers (the girls) as a role model. This face offers the girls glimpses and possibilities of what that new self will be (Wykes and Gunter, 2005).

Beauty is one of the important necessities both for <sup>4</sup> girls and women at all time. Especially in Indonesia, physical beauty is often required in job application. Jobs in tourism industry, aviation, marketing, sales and public relation often require attractive physical appearance and the body tall. The face of Indonesian girls in magazines really gives strong endorsement to such notion. In the previous images, girls in the front covers of teen magazine always look happy <sup>11</sup> shown by their smile) and extremely fair. Fairness or whiteness (having whiter skin color for girls) has become a strong understanding to Indonesians as a major effect of globalized beauty. This was hardly seen in the past. In old Javanese ideal of beauty was never about having lighter skin color. One of the oldest ancient Javanese literatures produced before Western influence in terms of colonization is *Kakawin* literature. According to Helen Creese (In Yulianto, 2007) the representations of female beauty in *Kakawin* are always associated with the nature for instance, the descriptions of female beauty in *Kitab Arjunawijaya*:

Oh, the idol of my heart, Oh my goddess,  
Tell me why you can be a goddess,  
You're the unparalleled beauty  
Everything you is similar to that  
done by the goddesses  
An Ashoka young leave is your waist  
Your beautiful breasts are colored in the yellow of coconut  
The wave of our hands are as beautiful as Gadung plants  
Blue lotus is the beauty of your eyes  
Lit during the month of such change



Because of your beauty, light loses its bright  
 No matter how many poems that exist on this earth,  
 Would never be enough to describe the charm of your beauty  
 Her hands are long like an arrow  
 Her hair is wavy and black,  
 She is slender yet strong,  
 The color of her skin is as yellow as saffron  
 Her eyes are frequently blinking as if blown by the wind, bushy hair  
 all those add to the charm of a beautiful face (in Yulianto 2007, translation mine)

The verses taken from that *kitab* (book) equalize female beauty with a goddess' beauty. Nature becomes an important category comparative to female beauty. A beautiful woman or girl is someone whose hair is black, physically slim but strong yet, and most importantly having yellow skin color and not white skin color. Other categories cover the ways she walks and behaves and such are compared with the ways nature creates beauty. Ideal beauty in this *Kakawin* literature connects woman and nature and vice versa.

Beauty concept and its relation to white skin color, according to McClintock, have a long history. McClintock has analyzed the soap from the Victorian Age in England in the 19th century, and argued that the soap was to be agents of racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Soap ads depend on the imperial culture and the colonized nature as a dichotomy of black versus white. Blacks were marked as "natural", which in this context implies to someone who is not civilized, uncivilized, wild, and also people who were "dirty" and "tainted": those needed to be purified. In such dichotomy, imperial culture was white, cultured, clean, and pure (in Prabasmoro, 2003: 37 - 38). Although McClintock's argument refers to the British colonization, the same argument is applicable to the Dutch colonization in the Indonesia (then was The Dutch East Indies). The policy of the Dutch colonial government echoed that of Victorian government. The colonial was white, clean, pure and civilized while the Native was dark and of lowest status. Dutch colonial law reinforced racial segregation separating the Dutch, foreign Orientals and indigenous Indonesians in terms of class and economic status where the first was the highest and the last was the lowest. Colonization has shifted the Indonesian concept of beauty from yellow to white, from darker skin color to fairer skin color, indicating that a girl is beautiful, clean and pure while having a higher social and economic status than the darker one. Contemporary face of Indonesian girls in the magazines is now fairer and whiter. This whiteness has become a universal standard applied most in every Indonesia. As globalization is defined as (*Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite*, Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011)

the process by which the experience of everyday life, marked by the diffusion of commodities and ideas, can foster a standardization of cultural expressions around the world. An extreme interpretation of this process, often referred to as globalism, sees advanced capitalism, boosted by wireless and Internet communications and electronic business transactions, destroying local traditions and regional distinctions, creating in their place a homogenized world culture. According to this view, human experience everywhere is in jeopardy of becoming essentially the same. This appears, however, to be an overstatement of the phenomenon. Though homogenizing influences do indeed exist, people are far from creating a single overarching world culture,

it clearly shows that fair skin color or white skin color is universalized and globalized as a measurement of beauty. This strongly corresponds with numerous whitening creams that are now abundant in Indonesian market, ranging from whitening body lotions, facial creams, soaps and many

others. The following ads in teen magazines have persuaded and constructed girls to be whiter in order to feel good about themselves. This process seems to be a natural while indeed it is naturalization by the consumer culture and consumerism.



Both local and global products as advertised above send the same message to Indonesian girls: you must be white, slim and tender then you will be rewarded with happiness and a boyfriend. What Orenstein says in her *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches From The Front Lines of the Girlie-Girl Culture* (2011) rings true. Girls are defined by their good look (i.e. white skin and slim) and boom, they can become Cinderella completed with her Cinderella Complex.

Yulianto names this phenomenon as *Pesona Barat* (2007 Western Charm, 2007). It is the desire for Indonesian women and girls to move their standard of beauty from local to more global. *Pesona Barat* indicates the ways Indonesians are charmed by Western influences in many forms of life: from language to lifestyle, from fashion to design, from beauty to values. There are various factors that contribute to this Western Charm phenomena. It is partly through the colonial occupation of the Dutch who insisted the superiority of the white race and dominated the Native, partly because the constructions of femininity and women roles under the Soeharto's rezim that created *State Ibuism*. *State Ibuism* is a term first coined by Julia Suryakusuma in 1987.

*State Ibuism* defines women as appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society - in that order. *Ibu* means *mother*, but the term has been stretched to cover a range of roles. Respected women with no children are addressed as "Ibu." While a broad concept, the state uses *ibu* in its limited, biological meaning. . . . The *State Ibuism* concept encompasses economic, political and cultural elements. It derives from the most oppressive aspects of both bourgeois "housewifization" and *Priyayi* [white-collar Javanese] *Ibuism*. As in *Priyayi Ibuism*, it commands women to serve their men, children, family, community and state. As in "housewifization," women are assumed to provide their labor freely, without exception of prestige or power. . . . Given the image of the state as family, one might call the predominant gender ideology *Bapak Ibuism* (father-motherism), with *bapak* [father/man] as the primary source of power and *ibu* [mother/woman] as one medium of that power. . . . State



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*Ibuism* is part and parcel of bureaucratic state's effort to exercise control over Indonesian society (Suryakusuma, p. 101 – 102).

*State Ibuism* fits both state paternalism and military ideology incorporating the state as “family” that necessitates sacrifice by its members for the sake of its welfare. Using this gender ideology where beauty ideal is a concept applied to the *priyayi* level, women who want to look beautiful must therefore follow such ideals. In the 1980s at the height of Soeharto's New Order, there were two famous cosmetic manufacturers Sari Ayu (the essence of beauty) and Mustika Ratu (the jewel of queen) that said to create their beauty products from the secret recipes obtained from the Javanese *priyayi* and palaces. Woman's beauty was under the control of men thus men had exclusive right to define beauty at their own will. Women's beauty functioned to only serve men. It was men's definition of beauty that controlled women. It was these two cosmetic companies that started the shift that a beautiful woman was one having white skin and not yellow skin colour as in traditional *kakawin* literature. The shift of meaning of 'yellow' to 'white' marks the changing of idealized skin color. In the past, the term signifying indigenous beauty such as 'black sweet' and 'dark brown' were common. However, *priyayi* ideal of beauty had shifted such term to fairer colour which was “yellow and fair.” When Sari Ayu and Mustika Ratu launched their first whitening product associated with aristocratic beauty, woman has been since imprisoned by the Western Charm. Beautiful was white, and this has been ideal beauty since then (Astuti in Yulianto, 2007: XII)

Other part contributes to the ideal white beauty for Indonesian females is the emergence of globalization via privatization of televisions under the Soeharto's New Order and post 1998 reformation era where liberation and democracy have paved ways to stronger present of global media. Today, large influences lie in the Indonesian entertainment industry which is dominated by the presence of *indo* (biracial Indonesians, of mixed blood between native Indonesian and Caucasian) or white skinned celebrities of native origin, and mostly the never ending appearance of advertisements for skin whitening products in various media.

Talking about beauty for girls in Indonesia, it is wise to see the changing exemplified below. These are pictures of girls then and now:

A Portrait of a Javanese girl from Banjarnegara, Central Java in 1880	Miss Indonesia 2005, Nadine Chandrawinata of Jakarta, 22 years old	Miss World Indonesia 2009, of Jakarta Karenina Sunny Halim, 23 years old	Miss Indonesia 2010 Nadine Alexandra Dewi Ames of Jakarta, 20 years old
			

It is not uncommon in Indonesian beauty pageants that the winner, be it Miss Indonesia or Miss World Indonesia is not from local origin. Some winners are *indo* (biracial Indonesian or mixed bloods). Three girls representing Indonesia in world beauty pageants like Miss Universe or Miss World are examples signifying beauty in Indonesian has been globalized and tends to shift toward

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Western beauty standards. Surprisingly, Miss World Indonesia 2009, Karenina Sunny Halim whose mother is an American cannot speak Indonesian fluently. She blamed on her overseas upbringing that fails her to fluently speak Indonesian (*Berita Indonesia*, 16 June 2009). In the span of more than 100 years, Indonesian conception of beauty has evolved to near Western standard signified by the more presence of indo beauty closer to the West ideals.

### The Face of Teen Girls in the Teen Magazines

Teen magazines are not at odd the beauty trend. The following images will show the shift of the front covers of Indonesian teen magazines from the past to present:

Front Cover of <i>Gadis</i> in 1970s	Front Cover of <i>Gadis</i> in 1980s	Front Cover of <i>Gadis</i> in 1990s
		
Front Cover of <i>Gadis</i> in 2009	Front Cover of <i>Gadis</i> in 2010	Front Cover of <i>Gadis</i> in 2011
		

The series of *Gadis* magazines front covers show that the concept of beauty for girls in Indonesia has evolved from the colonial moment to now. Some notable changes from those pictures are these girls' nose and skin color. If in the past, most girls in the teen magazines were shown to have darker color, contemporary girls are now having whiter skin colors and more pointed nose. 1980s as Yulianto discussed previously has started this shift by presenting more girls having white skin and pointed nose. More and more *indo* models filled the magazine front covers and became role models for beauty. This is completely different from the colonial era. Biracial girls of mixed blood of mostly

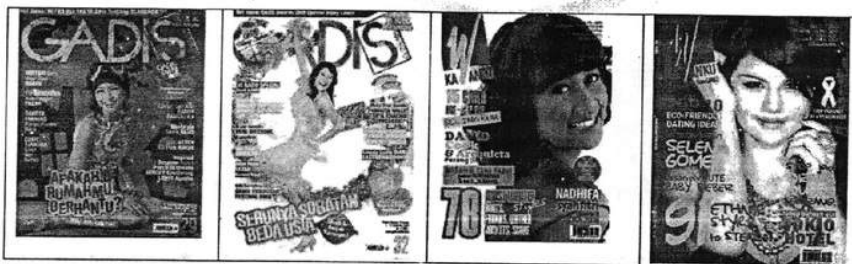


Dutch men and native mothers were abandoned and left in the orphanages (Taylor, p. 26). However, globalization brings altogether different effect. Nowadays, Indonesian entertainment industry is crammed with these *indo*. Being biracial is now taken as an advantage rather than a shame. Being biracial becomes an easy access to achieve a celebrity status in the entertainment industry. This indeed corresponds with the ideal beauty from the Western sphere that says "the iconic Western standard of beauty are those of extremely slim and tall body, the tanned skin, blue-eyed, large round luminous eyes, a petite and pointy nose, and blonde hair" (Lee, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> In recent years, the influence of Western perceptions of beauty has appeared on various <sup>37</sup> entertainment industries and spread across the glossy magazines, especially the franchise ones. Globalization may change public perspective of beauty (Onishi, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9505E0D81138F930A35753C1A9649C8B3>). Through globalization, Eastern and Western standards of beauty look more and more alike and become what the so-called universal beauty (Lee, 2007). Unavoidably, Indonesia standard of beauty for girls and women has been judged based on the Western notion of beauty as Western society is the dominant power in the worldwide. The ideal Western beauty through beauty contests like Miss Universe, Miss World, beauty icons or celebrities like Katy Perry, Ximena Navarrete as well as girl magazines like *Teen Vogue*, *Seventeen*, *CosmoGirl!* set the beauty standards across the globe.

From the linguistic point of view, the significant change in the *Gadis* magazine covers includes the use of more and more English phrases in the covers. In the 1970s to 1990s editions, the use of English words was very rare to almost nothing, but in recent years, English has turned to be a commonality, a trend. English has become a signal of globalization as well as sophistication for young Indonesians. The message these magazines send to their readers: being global means English. It is very common today that English phrases always appear on teen magazine front covers along with global celebrities.

<sup>14</sup> Contemporary local teen magazines such as *Gadis*, *Kawanku*, *Kartika*, *Cita Cinta* or franchise magazines such as Indonesian edition of *CosmoGirl!* or *Chic* have shown similar concept of beauty. The following front covers from various contemporary magazines show this globalized beauty.





International edition and Indonesian edition of *CosmoGirl!* and *Chic* magazine

<i>CosmoGirl!</i> internasional July 2008	<i>CosmoGirl!</i> Indonesia November 2008	<i>Chic</i> international edition	<i>Chic</i> Indonesian edition

The most striking thing on the front cover of the magazines that are franchised from the Western world such as *CosmoGirl!* and *Chic* have never used indigenous models or celebrities in their front covers despite those magazines are circulated in Indonesia. The use of Vanessa Hudgens as the model in both Indonesian and international (United States) edition marks a strong globalization of beauty. As Hudgens believed to be a beauty in the US, she is taken for granted also believed to be a beauty in Indonesia. Hudgens' popularity via *High School Musical* reaches international fame thus she is easily accepted as a role model for beauty everywhere. Hudgens has what so called as American beauty: a belief that the true beauty is those of typically American-look. The most obvious representation of American beauty is "Barbie Dolls" (Wright,

<http://www.sikhspectrum.com/042003/barbie.htm>). Barbie is usually portrayed as a young American girl who possesses white skin, large eyes (i.e., usually blue), pointy nose, smooth hair (i.e., usually blonde), thin and tall body, etc. All this gorgeous and flawless portrayal of Barbie is believed as the true beauty of American female. Barbie's beauty has been globalized into Indonesian beauty. All Indonesian teen girls can look at Hudgens for beauty model in spite of geophysical and cultural differences. This homogenization of beauty is strongly endorsed by the globalization of media.

Beautiful teen is synonymous with "cool look" meaning that girls should appear energetic, enjoying the joy of youth, fashionable, glamour, happy and of course never put an angry face in the magazine cover. Beauty here is defined as the ability of a girl in wearing make-up, choosing clothes that fit, fashion conscious and smiling at all time. Fun becomes a central factor in presenting a face in the magazine for girls. This utopian look and beauty neglects the fact that many challenges and problems girls need to handle in their daily life. The upcoming of National Examination for high school students has never been touched in these magazine covers. In these franchised magazines,

geopolitical differences are not a problem in the spread of globalization. Beauty tips are not dissimilar with beauty tips in any other teen magazines, local or international edition. The beauty tips are clearly visible because these tips function as a guide to have a good looking as the celebrities who are on the front covers of the magazines.

A simple survey to see the beauty conception for Indonesian teenagers was done by Charenina (2009), Istiqoroh (2009) and Wardani (2009) from November 2008 to January 2009. The result shows some interesting findings. This three-month survey distributed questionnaires to 125 high school students aged 12 to 18 year old in southern, northern, eastern, western and central Surabaya, East Java. Surabaya is the second biggest city in Indonesia with the population around 2.8 millions.<sup>2</sup> As an urban and metropolitan city, this city is itself inescapable from the effects of globalization, including the conception of beauty for teenagers. Like teens in any big city, female teens in Surabaya also read one or more magazines discussed afore. 125 respondents obtained does not certainly reflect the mainstream opinion for Indonesian teens yet the findings can show likely trends that students elsewhere may follow. Of this survey, 55% respondents believed that beautiful teens mean that they have white or fair skin color, while the rest chose yellow to darker skin color. Interestingly, 50.6% respondents prefer Indonesian beauty compared to non-Indonesian beauty such as Caucasian or African beauty. What type of Indonesian beauty chosen by these respondents, interestingly 35% chose *indo* beauty. This is somewhat new finding and such corresponds strongly to the high presence of *indo* celebrities in Indonesian entertainment industry. Historiographically, there is a significant shift to beauty conception for Indonesian teens from the colonial period to present. During the colonial time, as previously discussed, *indo* children were disposed and abandoned as they did not racially belong to the Caucasian colonials, foreign Orientals or indigenous colonized. They did not locate themselves in *either-or* racial belongings. However, more than 100 years later tremendous shift has shown. Nowadays, *indo* beauty has occupied Indonesian public mind as shown by 35% preference for Indonesian beauty. In relation to that, 48% respondents chose Caucasian beauty compared to any racial beauty. This 48% indeed marks the globalization of beauty has actually reached Indonesian teens. They are like any other teens in other parts of the world that are swept by the globalized beauty that gives much preference to the white Western beauty.

The newest trend of beauty for Indonesian teenagers that just been a few last months is the emergence of Asian beauty. The Korean wave (*hallyu*) that swept all over Asia has something to do with this. New appearances of boy bands and girl bands ala Korea (read South Korea) is continuously screen on television and presented on other medias such as magazines, news papers and the internet. What is interesting in this booming is the emergence of Chinese Indonesian celebrities. As Chinese Indonesians resemble Korean beauty, it is no wonder that they are now enjoying new status. Before 1998 Reformation, Chinese Indonesians were heavily discriminated. Soeharto's racial policy endangered and marginalized Indonesians of Chinese descendants. After the resignation of Soeharto in 1998, subsequent presidents (Habibie, Wahid and Megawati) introduced new regulations allowing Chinese to practice their traditions: such as publishing books and newspapers in Chinese, freely learning and speaking Chinese in public, and celebrating Chinese holidays. Since then, Chinese culture has appeared more and more in Indonesian cultural life. Nevertheless, the presence of Chinese Indonesian celebrities has not been so strong unlike today. Members of girl bands such as Cheery Belle and 7icons whom most members are Chinese descendants make their frequent appearance in the teen magazines.

<sup>2</sup> 2010 population census according to Biro Pusat Statistik (BPS, Centre of Statistical Bureau), <http://www.bps.go.id>. Access date 10 October 2011.



RA 1: Aim to find out the reasons behind great popularity of Thai sitcom television programmes broadcasted after 2005

RA 2: Aim to study the content adaptation of Thai sitcom programmes broadcasted after 2005 that has gained wide acceptance in the Thai society

### Framework

For this study, there are several concepts and theories that are used as a framework. But this article will only focus on the ones that are related to the two objectives previously mentioned. These concepts are "The Media Organization in a Field of Social Force" by Denis McQuail, and "Sociological Media Analysis Concept" by Arthur A. Berger, respectively. This study also use the concept of "Narration Theory and Semiology" as a framework for understanding and interpreting the text in sitcom's contents.

### Communicator or Mass Media Organization Study

Tunstall (1970) make an observation about communicator study or mass media organization study that mass media scholars focus mainly on audience study and media effect study. When considered in term of functional process, these two focus seems to be at the end of the process rather than the beginning. Therefore, mass media organization study aims to find out why the product of mass media has become that way.

Tunstall's observation is corresponding to political economists' interest. Kaewthep (1998) points out that this group of scholar wish to study about a media controller. Consequently, they focus on how external factors in terms of different aspects (economic, social, political, cultural, media ownership, management, organizational policy, technology and finance) has affected mass media organizations' function. How can mass media workers maintain their independence under different limitation, and how the product of mass media has reflect such image.

In this regard, McQuail (1994) collects factors affecting mass media organizations' function and conceptualize a framework called "The Media Organization in a Field Of Social Force". McQuail states that media operation is forced by two pressure factors: the external ones, and the internal ones. For the external factors, we have four forces that have pressure on the operation and creativity of media organization. Firstly, *social and political pressure* factor, which can be pressured by social institutions, like legal force or government policy. Secondly, *economic pressure factor*, which can be pressured by TV station's policies, its competitors, and sponsor's demands. The third one is *audience factor*, which can be pressured by demands, which relate to audience ratings, all of which have an impact on the economic pressure factor. The fourth one is *events plus constant information and cultural supply factor*, which can be in forms of attitudes, values, beliefs, and morals.

The internal factors, on the other hand, can be classified into two categories: The first one is *management factor*, in which media producers and media organizations can be pressured by the financial sources or human resource management. The second one is *media professional factor*, which is caused by differences in level of professionalism, which could vary in terms of difficulty, creativity, and standard of effectiveness. All these factors can put pressure on media organization, and can influence selection and adaptation of the media content.

### Sociological Media Analysis

The term "sociology" was coined by French philosopher August Comte, to refer to an integration of theological and practical human knowledge. Berger (1998) defines sociology as a



study human's social relation, and presents basic concepts or tools used by sociologists for social study. This concept allows us to see something researchers has never seen.

The second conceptualized framework of the second objective is by Arthur A. Berger. Berger conceptualizes a framework called "Sociological Media Analysis Concept". His concept suggested sociological methods of media analysis by focusing on the study relationship of people presented in the media through several dimensions. This study applies a few basic concepts, such as follow:

*Class* – sociological speaking, it refers to Socioeconomic Class, of which education, income and occupation, are considered.

*Lifestyle* – includes individual's personal taste, such fashion, car, entertainment, recreation, books. Lifestyle is related to socioeconomic class and reflect individual's image.

*Ethnicity* – is a group of people who share the same culture and tradition which differs from others. The shared characteristics may come from biological relation or shared community in the past.

*Race* – is a group of people who shared genetic heritage, such color of hair, skin, or eye shape.

*Role* – is an approach based on performance or behavior which has been assigned. Social role is created from behaviors that a human can learn and relate to other human's expectation. Each role depends on our social standing, for example, a role of teacher, monk, soldier, or thief.

*Status* – is a social prestige given to an individual who accomplishes his role, for example, two people taking a role of teacher, but may not receive the same status.

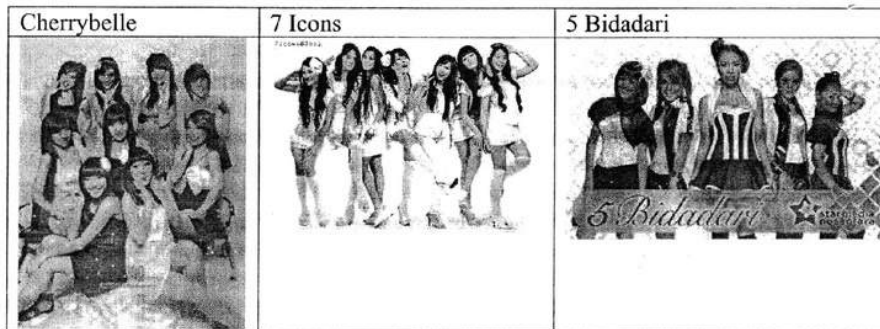
*Gender* – In term of sociology, genders are not only biologically divided, but they also covers an individual's sexual disposition, as well as its right and duty as defined by each society.

*Stereotype* – Horton and Hunt (1972) define the term as "a group-shared image of another group or category of people". Stereotypes can be positive or negative. Sociology believes that stereotypes are dangerous since they are formed by prejudice, so they can influence a hasty conclusion.

A sociological analyst's goal is to examine the types of relationship that stem from social traits of people. In this research, Berger's concept is used as a framework to examine how the social scenes presented through sitcoms show social traits of people differently from the past, in order to adapt the sitcoms so they can survive and gain more popularity in the Thai society.

Along with the two conceptualized frameworks mentioned earlier, add some attributes on time and media components will be added (Sender, Message, Channel & Receiver) to point out that the first objective of this research is geared towards the study of factors that influence the media as a communicator or sender, both before and after the year 2005. This is to see what factors have influenced the shifts in Thai sitcoms towards popularity. In like manner, the second objective of this research is to explore the sociological dimensions in sitcom's content adaptation. Finally, all can be merged as one framework for the main research study approach in Figure 1.2

**Figure 1.2 A Conceptualized Framework**



As these girls carry new representation of beauty, though not Western but still closer to Western definition (white skin, slim and pointed nose, dyed hair) - only the shape of their eyes is different, they have created a new notion of global beauty. Imitating their Korean predecessors such as SNSD, Miss A, 2NE1 and the like, these girls have brought Korean beauty to Indonesian landscape. As their status rises to fame, these girls who are now celebrities (not only as singers but actors and commercial models) have become role models for their fans. This undeniably has created a new standard of global beauty that comes not far from home. The East Asian beauty has enriched the beauty concept in Indonesia. Whether or not, this girl band phenomena and their beauty will last, only time will tell. Whether there is a new concept of beauty: be it still *let's white and see* like the ad shown earlier or simply let's just wait and see, time will determine.

It can be concluded that globalization has plagued all aspects of human life even at the most private level, such as the concept of female beauty as a form of self-identity. Although there has been a local adaptation of the global level, the beauty of teenage girls in the magazines remain dictated by the Western (United States) standards. Beautiful means popular so these faces show. Through the globalization, the world without borders (borderless world) has occurred even in the concept of adolescent beauty. Unfortunately <sup>7</sup>'s concept, through magazines, intentionally eliminates the diversity of the concept of beauty. Through globalization, the concept of beauty for teenage girls becomes so uniform and universal, as if all the young women have a similar appearance. What happens is the homogenization of the beauty concept without any room to interpret the beauty in different manners.

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### Magazine Front Covers

Majalah Chic

Majalah Cita Cinta

Majalah CosmoGirl!

Majalah Gadis

Majalah Hai

Majalah Kawanku

Majalah Kartika

Majalah Motor

Majalah Muscle

**Social Construction of Humour in Thai Sitcom Television Programmes****Vithaya Panichlocharoen**

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**Topic of the Submission**

Cultural Study

9  
**Social Construction of Humour in Thai Sitcom Television Programmes**

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**Background**

Looking back to the emerging of sitcom, we may see that western countries have become its center, like US, has systematically recorded everything including its origin. In US, sitcom was a newly developed format to be different from other comedic genre such as Stand up Comedy, or Sketch Comedy (a short comedic performance which usually take 1-10 minutes, and divided into small sections. Its storyline usually involves people from different occupations, celebrities, or even US presidents). One of the most successful sketch comedy show is "Saturday Night Live". Hartley (2001) considers sitcom as a combination of sketch comedy and situation drama. Sitcoms produced by US and UK are the most successful ones since they are imported overseas, especially countries with English as the first or second language. Sitcom's format fit well with Anglo-American TV production, since it requires only a studio with one or two scenes and a few inserts of exterior scene. Fixed characters are presented with situations created by the writing team and production team.

The first sitcom programme was "Pinwright Progress", which was aired during 1946-1947 in Britain. During almost the same period, from 1951-1957, in the United States, the sitcom "I Love Lucy" was also aired. According to Thai Magazine; A Day Magazine: Sitcom Issue, published on October 2007, the first Thai sitcom was called "Tukkata Sia Kaban", directed by Patarawadee Sritrirat, which was aired on Thai Television Channel 3 in 1975. This information is corresponding to several public record relating to Thai sitcom, for example, dissertations and Wikipedia article. However, Sritrirat explains that, originally, Tukkata Sia Kaban was not meant to be created as a sitcom, but because of some interruptions during production, the format of the show which was aired to the public is thought to be a sitcom.

"It was meant to be a drama, but Acharapan (Paiboonsuwan, who took to role of the main character "Jiab" and also wrote the script) is a great storyteller. I was amused by Jiab's naive personality but I did not think Jiab is funny. On the first day of shooting, I wanted to make it as a serious drama. I did the directing but also appearing in the last scene. I told everyone to rehearse while I went to change the costume. However the costume does not fit well, so I redo the makeup and tie my hair up to match the costume, then walk right into the queue. All the sudden, all actors burst out laughing. Back then, we taped the show but it also include commercials. If the taping fail, then we have to reshoot all over from the beginning. And this was the last scene, so all the actors try their best to improvise and it became a comedy. (Patarawadee Sritrirat, an interview with Voice TV, 11 January 2010)

However, in Kannika Wiengperm's research An analysis of the situation comedy in television drama "Khoo Chuen Chulamun" (1996) presents a new information that "Nussara" (aired in 1960 on Thai Television Channel 4 Bangkhunprom) should be considered the first sitcom of Thailand. This information was given during an interview that "Nussara" is replicated "I love Lucy", an American sitcom starring Lucille Ball, so this is a new milestone of the development of Thai sitcom study. This shows that the Thai television industry did not fall behind the West that much. Unfortunately, there was no such record found in Thailand because at that time, the concept of situational comedy did not exist in the country. In Thailand, Communication Arts curricula in

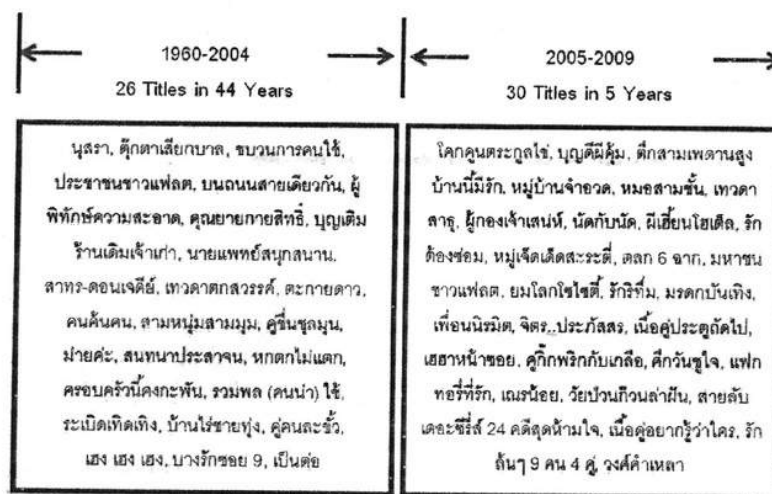


tertiary education would emerge around five years after that. "Nussara" was therefore viewed as a love comedy.

### Thai Sitcom Phenomenon

For the past few years, there are a few important events involving the development of Thai sitcom. These can be divided into two parts. The first one is the quantitative part, which explores the development of Thai sitcom, and the second one is the qualitative part.

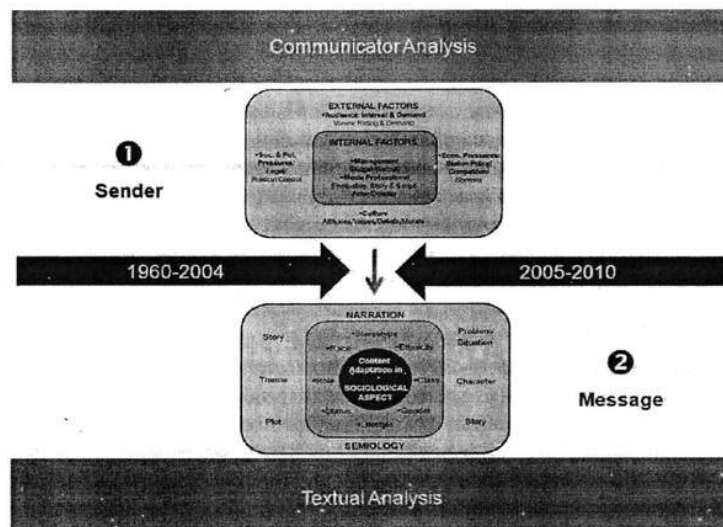
**Figure 1.1** Display comparison of the number of sitcom between year 1960-2004 and year 2005-2009



As shown in Figure 1.1 *The first one is the quantitative part*. It is found that during the 44 years from 1960-2004, there were 26 sitcoms broadcasted on Thai televisions. However, if we look back until recently, just in 5 years from 2005-2009, there were up to 30 sitcoms broadcasted in the Thai society. This phenomenon shows how interesting it is to explore why sitcoms have gained more popularity in the Thai society over time.

*The second one is the qualitative part*. The research reveals a tremendous change in the content of Thai sitcoms. According to Mellencamp (1986) on the origin of sitcoms, this type of television programmes belonged to the middle-class in the West. During the early years of broadcasting in the US, American housewives watched these programmes to get themselves ready before going out to work. As a result, the traditional drama programmes involving stories in family can not respond to this group of women. Hence the birth of sitcom to meet their demand. With storyline involving life outside the house, these housewives would feel that these shows extend their imagination. Since then, sitcom has become increasingly popular. However, we can see different development in today Thai sitcoms, which presented various characters from different classes. There are also gender issues and more complicated roles and characters. It would be interesting to study the content shift that resulted in the popularity of Thai sitcoms.

Consequently, this article is part of the research entitled "Social Construction of Humour in Thai Sitcom Television Programmes". The content of the article will present some part of the study and finding, with main research objectives as follow:



### Methodology

The research methodology is divided into two parts, according to the research objectives.

#### Methodology of the First Research Objective

The first methodology focuses on the popularity of Thai sitcoms from two 2005 onwards. There are two types of data and two methods of data collection.

The first type of data is oral document, as a primary data. The researcher used in-depth interview as a data collection method. Sampling technique is purposive sampling. Samplers are divided into two groups. *The first group* consists of four people who are considered the "legend" of Thai sitcom's pioneers, including an actor, a screenwriter, a top executive, and an owner of TV drama series production company who was once a director and producer of Thai sitcoms before 2005. Some of them currently are the sitcoms producers of their own company. *The second group* consists of five people who are key producers, directors, and screenwriters of Thai sitcoms, which have been continuously broadcasted from 2005 until present. In total there are 9 samplers.

The second type of data is written document, as a secondary data. Document analysis is employed to two types of document. *The first type* is magazines and books that contain interview report with "sitcom people" who talked about the process of sitcom production. *The second type* of document is undergrad theses of senior university students who had their internship in sitcom production companies.

#### Methodology of the Second Research Objective

The methodology that serves the second objective focuses on textual analysis. In understanding how the Thai society has been portrayed, both before and after 2005, through the social traits of sitcom characters, the researcher used three major selection criteria. They are the broadcast timing criteria, which must be before 2005 and 2005 onwards; the sitcom popularity criteria; and the broadcast criteria, in which the sitcoms must still be broadcasted during the time of this research (which is in 2009, when the researcher submitted his research proposal). Then purposive sampling technique was used in classifying the samples into 3 groups: First, sitcoms that have been broadcasted since before 2005 until present. The second one is sitcoms that have been



broadcasted after 2005 until present. The third one is sitcoms that just started broadcasting in the year this research began.

*The first group of sitcom samples* those having been broadcasted since before 2005, consists of 4 sitcoms, studied all of them, but selected only those broadcasted during the years 2002-2006. The fact that the researcher selected the years earlier than 2005 more than the years after is because the research samples have the second and the third groups, which already focus on the later years anyway. Next, used the simple random sampling by randomly picking one episode in every two months. As a result, from the time frame that defined earlier, There are one 120 episodes to study, including sitcoms like "Raberd Tertterng", "Heng Heng Heng", "Pen Tor", and "Bangrak Soi 9"

*The second group of samples* is the ones that have been broadcasted after 2005, consisting of 6 sitcoms. However, since half of them are from the same production companies as the first group, the researcher had to avoid the repetition by selecting the other half instead. Likewise, the simple random sampling technique was used by randomly picking one episode in every two months. As a result, for the first sitcom that was aired from 2006 to 2009 in 4 years, the researcher has picked 24 episodes of "Thevada Sathu". And for the second and third sitcoms that were aired during 2008 and 2009 (in two years), the researcher has picked 24 episodes all together, which are "Mahachon Chao Flat" and "True Love Next Door"

*The third group of sample* consists of a sitcom that was aired in 2009. During this year, there were only 16 episodes being broadcasted, so the researcher selected half of "Factory Teerak", which makes it 8 episodes.

In total, there are 176 episodes to conduct the textual analysis. The data in these episodes would also be used for other purposes besides this article, including humour construction method.

## **The Finding**

### The Finding of First Objective

The findings that correspond to the first objective that aims to find out the reasons behind great popularity of Thai sitcom television programmes broadcasted after 2005. The findings can be categorized into the external factors and the internal factors.

#### **External Factor**

Firstly, *the social and political pressure factor*. Results show that the factor that leads to sitcom popularity in 2005 is the political instability. During the past 10 years, Thailand has encountered the political crisis like it had never before. Although the Thai society had gone through several coup d'états, political conflicts that brought about the 2006's coup d'état were the worst to lay its deep root into the Thai society. This also resulted in more conflicts and disharmony among the people, even those in the same family, in some of which we can see the family members couldn't talk politics with one another. As a consequence, a majority of people got stressful or became tired of it.

This information corresponds to that of the National Statistics Organization, which revealed changes in television viewing behaviors of the Thai people during the past 10 years. People tended to view more of entertainment programmes and less of news report. Considering the nature of TV programmes that trigger laughter's, all those factors are positively correlated with sitcom viewing behavior.

Secondly, *the economic pressure factor*. The study shows that 8 years before 2005, there was a huge economic crisis in Thailand. Year 2005 was the year that the country started to recover from the economic slump, but had to face another problem of political instability, with coup

d'état in 2006. Both situations reinforced each other and pulled the Thai people into more stressful state of mind as mentioned.

However, both factors led to the fact that TV programming producers started to consider producing the programmes with a not-so-high production cost. Hence, sitcoms became their first choice, as the shooting took place in an indoor studio, which enabled them to control the budget. Also, the structure of sitcoms enabled their sponsors to engage in the content. Sponsors were thus inclined to show their interest in this kind of programmes. They not only paid for the commercial time, but they also got their products exposed in the programme's content. This is why we could see more scenes that featured a restaurant, a minimart, and internet shop, and an ice cream shop after the year 2005.

The third is *the audience factor*. The majority of producers believe that most Thai audiences do not expect sophisticated content in entertainment programmes. The nature of sitcoms, where each character has his or her certain personality, enables sitcoms to be easy to understand. Also, unlike the western sitcoms that are normally aired in season and audiences have to wait for another year to see the next season, Thai sitcoms are frequently broadcasted every week, like there's never be an ending, at least until the TV station stops granting the airtime. Such continuous broadcasts lead to emotional bonds between characters and audience in a sitcom. The bonds can get even stronger especially if a sitcom has been aired for several years. For example, in one episode of the sitcom "Pen Tor", a lovely character named "Phorjai", who is the sister of the protagonist, was plotted to die from an accident. In less than half an hour, several posts continuously appeared on one of Thailand's biggest and most popular webboards called "Panthip" stating their disagrees with such plot. This points out the strengths of sitcoms because it shows us that if we produce a sitcom that can gain popularity over time, the number of audience, or rating, of that sitcom will be even higher and well rooted. Producing this type of programmes therefore become quite a challenge for Thai producers.

The last one is *the events plus constant information and cultural supply factor*. One of the factors sitcom producers all agree to have had an impact on the success of Thai sitcoms since 2005 is that Thai people are good nature. The country has long been called "Thailand, the Land of Smile". This implies that Thai people are more prone to smile and laugh easily than other natives. When they hear a funny story, they feel like it is a "play", which means doing something fun and relaxing, not something too stressful. However, in the meantime, they can also use the word "play" in a context of being in earnest as well. All these lead to the fact that, in Thai society, the concepts of 'being serious' and 'fun' are so close to each other they are considered inseparable. That is, Thai people can express their humour even with a serious issue. Sitcoms are therefore the type of programme that is easily acceptable among the Thais.

In its early stage until the year 1995, sitcoms were only popular among educated urban people because producers of sitcoms at that time were university graduates who possessed humour. The process of humour creation or construction could therefore be considered a social niche, and sitcoms were not widely popular as a result. However, a little bit before 2005, a lot of producers attempted to continuously add comedians into the plot. And this has changed the sitcom phenomenon in the Thai society. Sitcoms has gained more popularity and called for laughter among the greater number of audience. This will be discussed in details in the internal factors topic.

#### *Internal Factor*

The first is *management factor*. Sitcoms that were broadcasted before 2005 mainly created humour from the screenplays and professional actors and actresses. Such creation was mostly



performed by the artists who were university graduates. However, the success of sitcoms after 2005 was a result of "casting" and hiring professional comedians (or what we call "lounge comedians"), a majority of whom came from the lower class, with lower education and usually performed with physical mishap and obscenity. These characters have brought about more laughter from more audiences, and led to such a big change in Thai sitcoms. There have been so many 'lounge comedians' turning to perform sitcoms on screens that people start to say that 'lounge comedians' do not perform in the lounge any more.

The other internal factor is *media professional factor*. This has a connection with the management factor. When sitcom producers want more lounge comedians on their screens, they have to change the way they direct the sitcoms in that producers usually give the opportunity to the comedians to improvise their jokes or gags in the scenes. This leads to a change in the way actors and actresses work, that is, they have to adapt themselves to be able to promptly respond to the jokes conveyed by the comedians. As a result, almost everyone involved in a sitcom production needs to be alert and trying to think of how they can create humour during the shooting all the time. This proves that humour creation in sitcoms does not need to come from the screenplay only.

#### The Finding of Second Objective

The findings that correspond to the second objective, which aims to study the content adaptation of Thai sitcom programmes broadcasted after 2005 that has gained wide acceptance in the Thai society. Also in answering to the second objective, I would like to point out some changes in social attributes represented through sitcoms.

The first social attribute is *class*. From this study, it is found that in one sitcom, they do not present social relations of people from just one social class any more. However, in one sitcom, there can be a scene of an upper-class lady getting married with a middle-class man whose son-in-law's friend fell in love with his housemaid. So maybe we can call it "one sitcom fits for all".

The second one is *social role*. In sitcoms, they usually create characters based on the real situations. But in sitcom's 'dummy situation', the roles of some characters were made stronger or more intense to create humour. For example, employer-and-employee's roles, where an employee can tease or argue with his or her employer like we should not do in real life. On the other hand, the employer can be very lighthearted and tease his or her employee. Or even the maid's roles in sitcoms have been presented as having a closer relation with her employer than usual.

The third and fourth attributes are *gender* and *stereotype*. The key female characters in sitcoms can still maintain the stereotypes of being lovely, nice, disciplined, and being conservative in relationships. However, the stereotypes of male characters are clearly different from what they used to be. A playboy character has been added, sometimes so much that the characters become sly and obscene, in order to create humour among the audience. The added characteristics usually lead to some kinds of mistakes that result in some razzle-dazzles that need to be solved. Moreover, in the present Thai sitcoms, we can see roles of homosexual male. In one sitcom, it is quite common to have a key character that is gay. This is unlike the western tradition, which clearly distinguishes gay sitcoms or queer sitcom from normal ones. However, whereas Thai sitcoms freely give the opportunities to gays, the stereotype of them appears of being more of a gay just being infatuated with a guy rather than something else.

The last social attribute is *lifestyle*. Generally, characters in sitcoms spend their time mainly at home and at work, although sometimes we can find scenes outside of these two places. However,

in most sitcoms after 2005, a scene of recreational place is usually added. Such recreational scenes vary from one sitcom to another, depending on the plot. For instance, it can be a bar, a nearby restaurant, a minimart, or a cafeteria. Characters in recent sitcoms spend their time in such area more than at work or home. This is because in Thai sitcoms, there are up to 8 or 10 key characters. It is therefore necessary to create a space for them so that they can share some situations together. Moreover, recreational scenes are related to the programme's sponsors.

The social attributes presented through the world of sitcoms have revealed to us that there are some shifts in the content of Thai sitcoms. Such shifts occurred in order to expose various attributes through more characters in just one sitcom story. This enables the story to capture the attention and increase popularity among today's audiences, who differ in terms of age, gender, social status, and knowledge. This is different from the past, when sitcoms tried to reach only the middle class. It could be said that this content shift has played a vital role in making sitcoms become of greater popularity in the Thai society from 2005 onwards.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, Thai sitcoms's adapting is caused by internal and external pressures from mass media organizations. Originally, sitcoms is a TV format for middle-class westerners, but in order to be successful and draw laughter from Thai people, it needs to adjust in many aspect, such as changing its format to fit in the current social situation, It also changing audience group, from middle-class to Thai lower-class majority, so its message must be accessible to wider audience.

Mills (2005) discussed the roles of sitcom in society, that sitcom production is based on social standard of each society. It is proved that sitcom humour is unique and limited to its own society. It is aware that comedy and sense of humour are localized. Consequently, local TV stations need to protect their national identity. They need to understand that, by airing sitcoms produced by a country with dominating cultural influence such as US, it can be regarded as "an invasion". A sitcom does not just represent cultural identity and idealism, but it is one approach to define culture and fulfill its own understanding. Comedy is one of the ways which individual culture can present itself to outside world. As a result, several national TV stations demand that local comedy must be adequately presented, so it can become national awareness. Comedy becomes an important social tool, as well as a significant approach of human interactive. The success of comedy can create social connection and distinguish "an insider" from "an outsider". Therefore, Thai sitcom's current success may rely on its adaptability, and make both producers and audience "an insider".



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